

# CAHS

The Connecticut Association for Human Services  
110 Bartholomew Avenue · Suite 4030  
Hartford, Connecticut 06106  
www.cahs.org

Michael Rohde, President  
James P. Horan, Executive Director  
860.951.2212 x 235  
860.951.6511 (fax)

**Testimony before the Human Services Committee**  
**Re: S.B. 391 – An Act Concerning Child Care Subsidies for the Unemployed**  
**Under the Care 4 Kids Program**  
**Submitted by Maggie Adair, Deputy Director**  
**Connecticut Association for Human Services**  
**March 11, 2010**

Good afternoon, Senator Doyle, Representative Walker, and members of the Human Services Committee. I am Maggie Adair, Deputy Director of the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a 100-year-old statewide nonprofit organization that works to end poverty and engage, equip, and empower all families in Connecticut to build a secure future. I also serve as a Steering Committee member of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance.

I am testifying on **S.B. 391, An Act Concerning Child Care Subsidy for the Unemployed under Care 4 Kids Program**. This bill reiterates components of current Care 4 Kids regulations. However, although policies exist to guide effective implementation of the program, on-the-ground practices of the child care subsidy program do not necessarily meet the expectations and intent of the regulations.

This new bill language captures the reasonable timeline *already* established in the Care 4 Kids regulations for an application to be processed in 30 days. Unfortunately, staffing and backlog issues have resulted in some applications not being touched and/or responded to within 30 days, which in turn results in a processing period that often exceeds 60 days. **It must be made clear that the 30-day determination outlined in this bill does not then give the agency the license to deny applicants if the application is not completed within the 30-day time period.** The due process of missing items request being sent to applicants must be adhered to as outlined in the regulations. It is imperative that the Department of Social Services (DSS) recognize that the bill calls for a determination of a “properly completed application” within 30 days.

CAHS recommends two additions to this bill that would make a significant improvement in the Care 4 Kids program:

- **As long as there is demand under current eligibility requirements, the full amount appropriated for this line item should be expended.**
- **The Department of Social Services may restrict eligibility if and only it appears that demand will exceed the program’s appropriation for the fiscal year, and in this instance, DSS must provide 60 days notice before the changes go into effect.**

**As long as there is demand under current eligibility requirements, the full amount appropriated for this line item should be expended.** The Legislature budgeted \$103.87 million for FY10 to Care 4 Kids based on the level of demand and spending in FY09. However, DSS plans to only spend \$93 million, which is the maintenance of effort required to keep the \$13 million in the

Child Development Block Grant (CCDBG) ARRA funds. That means \$10 million appropriated by the Legislature will not be used to help parents gain access to child care and enable them to work.

The Care 4 Kids program was abruptly closed in May of 2009 to non-TFA parents. The program also imposed new restrictions in eligibility that resulted in some families being bumped from the program when they experienced a small increase in income. As a result, within six months enrollment in the program plummeted from 22,175 to 16,953, which prompted DSS to reopen the program in November of 2009 in hopes of reaching the maintenance of effort spending. As a result of the program closure, 5,000 fewer children were served. DSS is struggling to reach \$93 million – not necessarily because of lack of demand – but because the program was closed for six months, because parents were bumped off the program under new eligibility criteria, and because there is a significant backlog in processing applications to enroll and re-enroll parents.

The Legislature appropriated \$103.87 based on demand and understanding the importance of providing quality child care that enables low-income parents to work. Legislative intent should be respected.

**The Department of Social Services may restrict eligibility if and only it appears that demand will exceed the program's appropriation for the fiscal year, and in this instance, DSS must provide 60 days notice before the changes go into effect.** When the program was abruptly closed in May 2009, providers and parents were given less than 24-hour notice. This is not reasonable. Especially during these financially taxing times when child care providers are struggling to keep their programs open, it is a reasonable ask for DSS to give providers ample notice that they can plan accordingly for the prospective loss of income. It is also reasonable to give parents time to adjust to a program closure or change in eligibility criteria.

The closing and reopening of the Care 4 Kids program has been haphazard and lacks a data-driven approach. As a result of the six-month closure, the reduction in spending was apparently higher than expected. DSS originally planned to close the program in February 2010, but now plans to keep the program open to June 2010 – a good thing for parents and providers! But the lack of planning and data is concerning. DSS anticipated that it will spend less than \$93 million by the end of June, possibly as much as \$9 million less. If the state cannot spend the \$93, it risks losing the \$13 million in ARRA funds, \$11 million of which was expended in FY10.

I would like to make two more points about the Care 4 Kids enrollment process.

**First**, this is not to slight the hard work of the United Way of Connecticut, which is the DSS-funded Care 4 Kids contractor. There is currently inadequate staffing to handle the backlog of applications caused by the program closure.

**Second**, like other DSS programs, enrollment is done by paper. CAHS supports a single-point-of-entry procedure for state-funded programs and services and a combined, on-line application and enrollment processes for programs that serve children and families. On-line applications would be quicker, better serve children and families, reduce wasted paperwork, and make much better use of staff handling applications. We hope that the DSS modernization project moves quickly along.

CAHS supports the overall intent of S.B. 391, spotlighting the need for policies and regulations to be enforced as practice. We are an organization that has been working for 100 years to combat poverty and create opportunities for children and families. The recommendations outlined are in full alignment with that mission, and we trust that the legislature will recognize that the recommendations outlined in this testimony are in alignment with the mission of the state.